

TONY PAYNE

THE
THING
IS...

GOD, YOU AND YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

NOW WITH
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

"The thing is!"

That's what we say when we are at last getting to the point.

The bushes have been beaten around, the chase has been cut to, and we are finally getting to the thing we've been avoiding but that now needs to be spoken.

What is that thing for you?

What is the thing that makes sense of your life but that you don't often talk about?

What is the point of it all, the purpose, the real reason you get out of bed in the morning?

From the author of *The Trellis and the Vine* comes an opportunity to pause and take stock of our lives, and to discover the life-changing purpose that God has for each one of us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Payne is the author of more than 30 books, ministry courses and Bible studies, including *Two ways to live: the choice we all face* and *The Course of Your Life*. He now works as a ministry trainer and writer-in-residence at Campus Bible Study (UNSW).

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The Thing Is

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books like this possible.

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1. Who am I?

The thing is.

That's what we say when we want to signal that the next words to come out of our mouths are (at last) the point. The bushes have been beaten around, the chase has been cut to, and we are finally getting to the 'thing'—to the issue we've been avoiding but that now needs to be spoken.

Perhaps it's your boss explaining why in fact you're not getting a pay rise; or your teenager owning up as to why you no longer have a side mirror on the car; or your boyfriend confessing the real reason he's breaking up with you.

In each case there is a slight pause, and sometimes an apologetic look for all the excuses and small talk that has led up to this, and then those three words: "The thing is". (Or if we're in America, "Here's the thing".)

Following those three words, and perhaps another brief silence, out comes the truth that we've been longing for or dreading. I can't give you a pay rise because you simply haven't been performing. I drove too close to a parked bus and took the mirror clean off. I just don't like being with you any more.

The ‘thing’ might be good news or bad. It might reassure us or shatter us. But at least now we have some clarity. We can stop pretending or avoiding the issue. We can strip back the layers and all the rubbish, and get to the reality that is there underneath, and which matters most.

We can talk about the thing that really is.

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Imagine you’re thrust into some new social setting—you’ve just joined a group at church, or you’re attending a training course for work—and you’re given five minutes to introduce yourself and give people a sense of who you are. You talk about what you do for a living, who your family are and where you grew up, what you like doing on the weekend, what your hopes for the future are, and so on. This goes on for a little while, but all of a sudden a wave of honesty sweeps over you and you pause, lean slightly forward, and say: “The thing is...”

What would come out of your mouth next?

If you had to spell out the thing that really makes sense of who you are, the basic truth that defines you, the real purpose or longing that drives you—what would it be?

I think most of us would find it a little hard to say, off the cuff. We don’t tend to think about these big issues from week to week. And in one sense, we can’t. We’re too busy just surviving or getting on with whatever is dominating our life at the moment.

However, if we were forced to, or if we were given the time and space to, we all do have an answer to that question.

We all base our lives on something. We are all driven by something. In the midst of all the hassles and details of the daily grind, there are some basic truths that define us and give our lives meaning.

A college student in his early 20s might say, “The thing is: I just want to live for the moment. I hate all the expectations that people put on me. I just want to be me.” A young mother in her early 30s might say, “The thing is: I’ve always dreamed of having a husband and children. But now that I have them, I’m not as happy as I thought I would be.” A working man in his late 40s might say, “The thing is: I want to be a success, and do something that actually makes a difference. And I love my wife and kids. I just wish I could juggle it all better, because the truth is I feel pretty tired and worn down, and like I’m not really succeeding anywhere.”

What would it be for you?

What is the often unspoken truth that really defines you? The longing that drives you? The ‘thing’ that really shapes who you are and what you do?

The aim of this short book is to help you answer those questions in a new way. It’s a brief pause in the midst of our daily lives to explore the underlying truth about our daily lives. It’s an opportunity to consider the ‘thing’ that we all must face at some point: *Who am I really, and does my life make any sense?*

Few questions are more significant. If there is some deeper meaning and purpose to our lives, what could be more important than knowing and understanding it, and living in its light? And what could be worse than living our entire lives without understanding what our lives were really for?

This in fact is one definition of freedom: to be and do what we were truly intended to be and do—like an old bat that has been used to prop open the laundry door, but is rescued and returns to the field of play to feel again the glorious freedom of striking the ball.

That’s the freedom I want to write about in the chapters to follow.



I write these words as a Christian, and I expect that many of my readers will also be people of Christian conviction (although this book is not only for such people). For Christians, there are certain answers to these big questions that we know off by heart.

Who am I? As a Christian we might answer, “A child of God”, or “A follower of Jesus Christ”. And what is my purpose in life? Many Christians would say, “To give glory to God” or “To worship God in all that I do” or “To be a good Christian person”.

However, in my experience these somewhat vague expressions don’t always serve us well in the pressure and distraction of daily life. They are not sufficiently clear—or we have not clearly thought through what they mean. They certainly don’t seem clear enough to *drive* our daily lives and make a difference to what we do, if the lives of many Christians are anything to go by.

For many of us, Christianity can feel like a veneer that has been tacked onto the surface of our lives. We go to church on Sundays. We might even do stuff at church on Sundays,

like hand out the bulletins or play in the band. And we have slightly higher (or different) moral standards to those around us. But in most other respects, our goals and aims in life seem indistinguishable from those of our neighbours. We want a nice house in a good street; we want to be secure and successful; we want to enjoy life and love; we want our kids to go to good schools and to turn out well; and so on.

The things that drive us and that really matter to us—our aspirations—don't seem to have been affected very much by what we say we believe when we stand up in church on Sundays—because they don't seem so different from the aspirations of all those people around us who aren't in church on Sundays.

My aim in what follows, then, is to challenge your understanding of the Christian faith and its answers to these big and basic questions. In particular, my hope is that you will gain:

- a fresh understanding of who God is, and what his purposes are in our world
- a fresh understanding of yourself—of who you really are, what you're here for, and what your future holds
- the clarity and freedom and joy of knowing what to do with the rest of your life from this point on.

Those are big aims for such a little book. But if the Bible and human history have taught us anything, it's that God has a habit of achieving great things through small, humble and outwardly unimpressive means. I pray that this book, which meets all three of these criteria, will be the unlikely means for God to do something extraordinary in your life.